



The President's Daily Brief

21 April 1970

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

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PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

Judging from Madame Binh's statement in Paris yesterday, the Vietnamese Communists, although stopping well short of outright rejection of the French proposal for talks on Indochina, are approaching it with a considerable degree of circumspection. *(Page 1)*

In Cambodia the fighting goes on, mostly to the disadvantage of the Lon Nol government. *(Page 2)*

The Thieu government seems to be adopting a more conciliatory policy toward two groups--the students and the Cambodian minority. *(Page 4)*

Soviet industrial production for the first quarter is 8.9 percent greater than in the first quarter of 1969. *(Page 5)*

Supporters of former dictator Rojas Pinilla in Colombia are already beginning to cry foul as the ballot counting proceeds at a leisurely pace. *(Page 6)*

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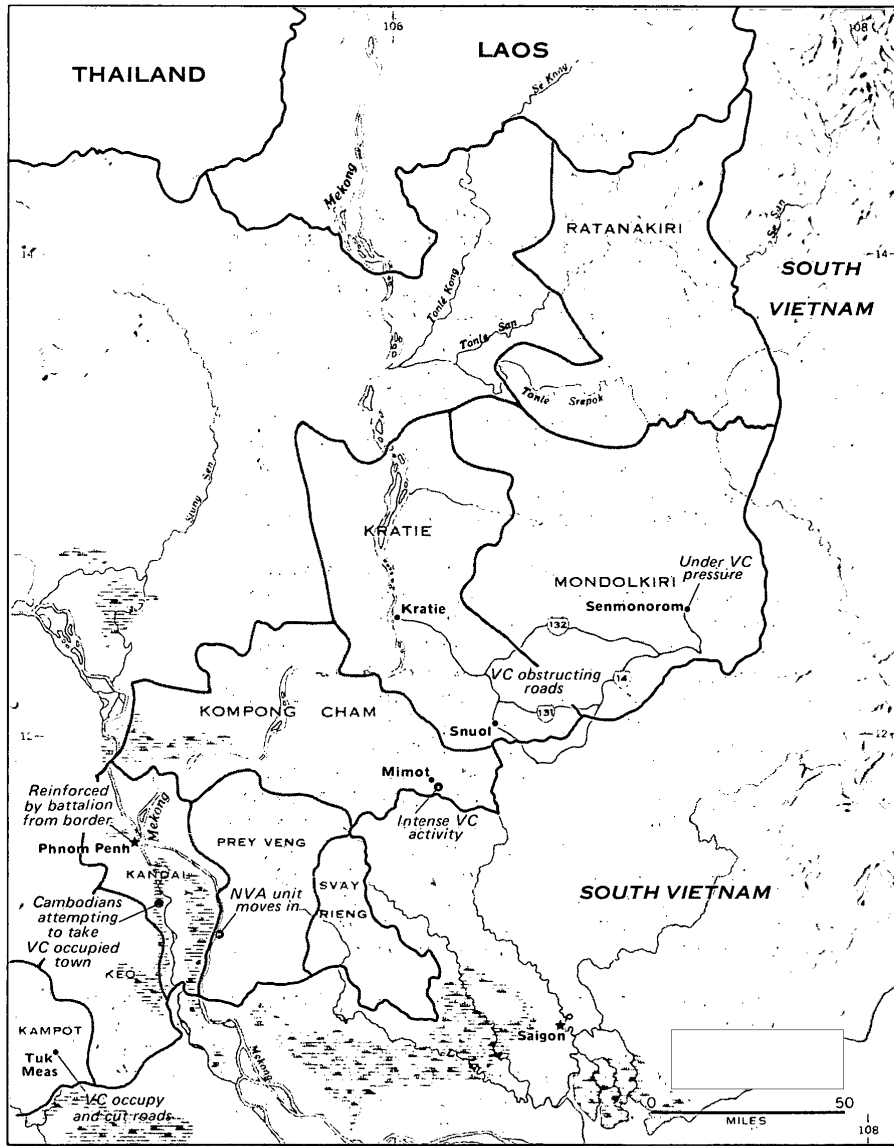
INDOCHINA

The Vietnamese Communists are keeping their options open on France's recent proposal for talks on Indochina. Madame Binh, the Viet Cong "foreign minister," told newsmen in Paris yesterday that because of US "aggression" in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, the French proposal "in these conditions cannot settle" Indochina's problems. She added, "We think that if the French Government wants to contribute to restoring peace in Indochina, it should contribute to ending American aggression and guaranteeing the people of Indochina their rights."

This statement seems to conflict with Soviet Ambassador Malik's more positive comments last week on the French initiative. Viewed in conjunction with his later "clarification," however, Malik's statement does not seem too far from Madame Binh's. Malik's first aim may have been to make clear the Communists' interest in the idea of regional talks; having accomplished this, he then backtracked in order to keep from wedding the Communists too closely to the notion. Madame Binh followed with a statement which fell well short of outright rejection but which made it clear that the initial Communist bargaining position would be tough indeed.

The balance of the evidence suggests, therefore, that the Vietnamese Communists are still seeing how much mileage they can make by encouraging political and diplomatic activity on Indochina as a whole. Madame Binh's statement merely provides an index of the caution with which they are moving. They are not likely to move much faster in coming weeks, both because the course they have set contains a good many inherent dangers and because they are almost certain to have trouble bringing militants such as the Chinese along with them.

CAMBODIA: Current Situation



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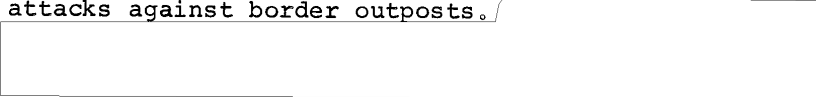
CAMBODIA

The fighting goes on in several parts of the country. Four government battalions are trying to drive the Communists out of the river town they occupied yesterday, about 18 miles south of Phnom Penh. The government, to strengthen its defenses around the capital, has pulled back a battalion that had been fighting near the South Vietnamese border in Svay Rieng Province.

The withdrawal of Cambodian units from the border areas may indeed be one aim of recent Communist feints south of Phnom Penh.

Farther south in Kampot Province, Communist elements two days ago occupied a town and blocked several nearby roads. In Prey Veng Province, a 200-man North Vietnamese unit occupied a district headquarters Sunday, according to a Cambodian Army intercept.

The government's position in Mondolkiri Province, on the northeastern border, also appears to be deteriorating. Dependents are being airlifted from the provincial capital following recent Communist attacks against border outposts.

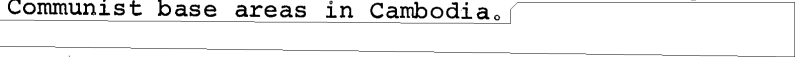


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The Communists seem to be having some success recruiting among the indigenous population. There are several reports indicating the Communists are arming villagers, including ethnic Cambodians. One such report, from the police chief in Kompong Cham Province, claims that the Communists are rapidly extending their control over the population along the border southeast of Mimot town. He reported they were murdering loyal peasants, securing foodstuffs, and destroying public buildings and the houses of civil officials.

* * *

President Thieu has reiterated that he recognizes the danger of moving too aggressively against Communist base areas in Cambodia.



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South Vietnamese units have been making generally shallow raids across the Cambodian line almost daily since late March. One of the biggest battles to date, however, took place yesterday just across from the northern delta, resulting in some 140 Communists and 20 South Vietnamese soldiers killed. So far, it appears that the South Vietnamese raids into Cambodia have disrupted enemy base areas and operations, but it is not clear that many Communist units have been seriously hurt.

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SOUTH VIETNAM

The trial of 11 students, begun yesterday, has been suspended pending a decision by the Supreme Court on whether the military tribunal has jurisdiction in the case. Ten other students accused of disturbing public order were provisionally released before the trial was suspended.

It will be recalled that the role of the military tribunal has been a highly contentious issue, especially since Tran Ngoc Chau's trial. Postponement of the student trial was doubtless prompted by the government.

In another move to ease tensions, the Thieu government is trying to arrange passage of new legislation restoring special minority status to ethnic Cambodians living in South Vietnam. [redacted]

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[redacted] this is part of a deal under which Cambodian monks, who have been agitating sporadically since last November, have promised to desist from further demonstrations.

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In addition to solving a troublesome domestic problem, settlement of its dispute with the Cambodian monks would put the Thieu government in a better position to make representations with the Lon Nol government over treatment of the Vietnamese minority in Cambodia.

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USSR

Soviet industrial production in the first quarter of 1970 was 8.9 percent greater than in the first quarter of 1969, and labor productivity was better than last year by 7.9 percent. These figures indicate a relatively large increase in output despite an unusually small growth in industrial employment.

Soviet panegyrists are sure to claim the improvement is a result of the current campaign to tighten labor discipline and to intensify supervision and workers' efforts. The real reason, however, is that 1969 was so bad it makes 1970 look better than it really is.

* * *

The production schedule of the Fiat plant in the USSR has become the subject of a high-level difference of opinion. In Moscow last week, the minister of the Soviet automobile industry, Aleksandr Tarasov, issued a very pessimistic statement about Fiat's ability to meet its 1970 production schedule--30,000 cars. In Rome, almost at the same time, Fiat's assistant general manager, Vincenzo Buffa, claimed that a handful of cars has already been produced, that about 1,500 will be turned out before summer, and that the year's plan will be met.

Presumably, both men have access to the same data. At this point, we cannot tell whether Tarasov is underestimating or Buffa is overestimating. Tarasov might believe that he will look better in December if he leads his peers to expect less than they will get. Buffa, of course, has to be optimistic in order to keep his job.

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NOTES

Canada: The overwhelming support given Trudeau's Arctic pollution control bill by press and parliament demonstrates the satisfaction many Canadians feel about tweaking Uncle Sam's nose. The only complaint from the opposition is that the government did not go far enough toward establishing Canadian sovereignty over all the waters of the Arctic archipelago.

Colombia: Demonstrations in Bogota in favor of presidential candidate Rojas Pinilla were broken up by troops yesterday, but there is a possibility of further disturbances. Rojas' followers fear the government is manipulating Sunday's election returns in favor of National Front candidate Misael Pastrana who, according to the latest figures, leads by a slim margin; the final tally may not be available before Sunday. Although there have only been minor incidents thus far, the government may declare a state of siege to prevent further disorders.

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